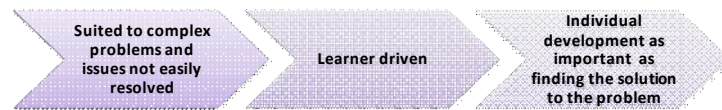


What is action learning?

Action learning

A process which brings colleagues together to:

- Work on projects based on real issues
- Make significant work place improvements
- Simultaneously enhance their own skills

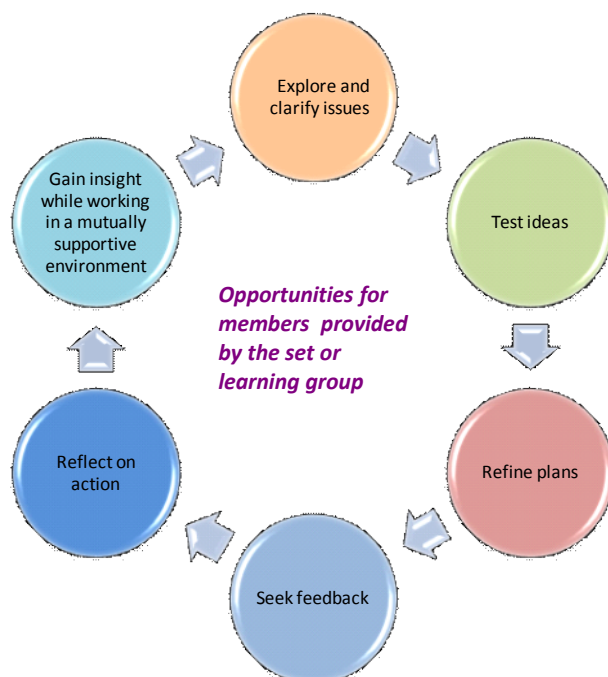


An ideal strategy for professionals striving to improve their practice

Action learning gives professionals a structured approach for:

- Developing a plan of action
- Acting to implement the plan
- Observing outcomes
- Reflecting on the process

In a typical action learning project this cycle may be revisited a number of times.



Action learning has proven to be extremely successful in educational settings over the past decade. Teachers ranging from principals to early career teachers speak about it as a career changing strategy. They have found that it is ideally suited to school improvement because it provides them with a process of learning from their actions and experiences by taking time to question and reflect. The work in schools tends to be so hectic that this structured reflection is often neglected. The power of action learning is that in tackling challenging projects school leaders acquire the tools to help them face future problems and challenges more confidently and effectively.

Action learning is about questioning. Learning to ask the right question is fundamental. A good question can change the way we see situations and ourselves and can be a permanent eye-opener. Secondary school principal

Action learning creates an opportunity for us to become conscious of what we do, how we think and what we believe. Secondary school principal

It's just amazing. I can't believe that I could achieve so much. This is the best learning that I've ever been involved in. Classroom teacher

In essence people join an action learning set or group because it is one of the most effective, positive and supportive ways to tackle a significant problem.

What does action learning look like in practice?[2]

Action learning usually involves:

- A challenging shared project or a group project with no easy solution
- A facilitator or set adviser. Members of the group sharing the role of set adviser
- Regular meetings of a substantial length where set or group members work on their project
- A sustained period of time to implement the project
- A set or group of approximately 4-8 members
- A structured process which is followed by all set or group members

The set or group makes a commitment to implement their project and to follow a set of agreed protocols and processes.

^[1] www.icvet.tafensw.edu.au/resources/action_learning.htm

^[2] Action learning is hard to define and there are many effective forms. Even Reg Revans, who pioneered action learning, failed to define it and used multiple forms throughout his career.

Action learning terms and definitions



Action learning begins with real work to be done.

It is a process of learning and reflecting with the support of a group or set of colleagues.

Each member of the action learning group identifies a work issue or project to explore with the support of the group.

Group members follow protocols to ask questions to assist their colleague to reach a deeper understanding of their issue and to make plans to implement their work.

Between meetings each member implements their plan and reports back to the group at the next meeting.

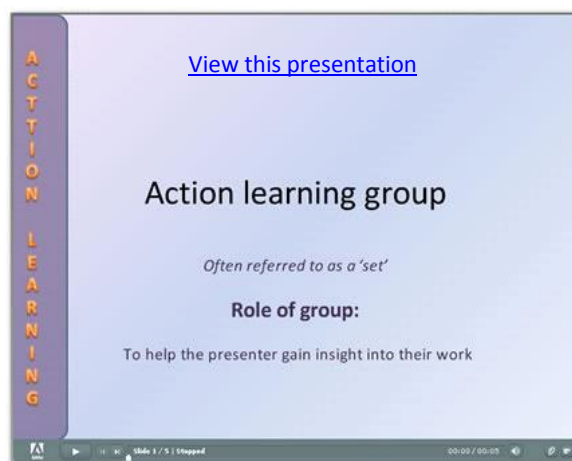
Action learning groups are led by a *facilitator* or *set advisor*.

Action learning is different from **action research**.

Action research participants set questions or a hypothesis to explore as the basis of the process. It is a structured enquiry process through which change and understanding are pursued simultaneously. It is cyclical; reflection is used to examine previous action and to plan the next one. It can be pursued individually or in groups with the support of a facilitator.

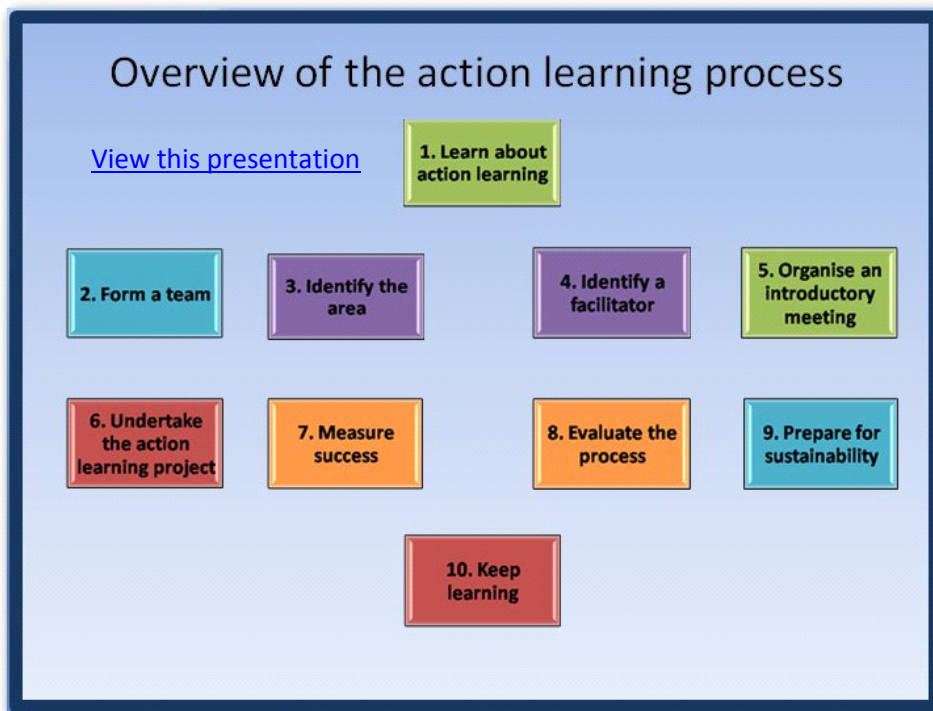
Action learning? - Action research?

Some people find it hard to distinguish between action learning and action research. The literature often confuses the terms. Many quality learning programs contain elements of both. Both are excellent work based learning strategies. This resource does not set out to contribute to that debate. It is meant to be a practical guide to support the work of NSW DET teachers, leaders and staff who are committed to improving student learning outcomes.



Overview of the action learning process

Play this Flash presentation to view the steps for designing, implementing and evaluating an action learning process.



Resources

Web based action learning resources

The NSW TAFE has some excellent resources. A summary of websites, publications and links to a rich range of quality resources can be found at: http://www.icvet.tafensw.edu.au/resources/action_learning.htm

The Western Australia DET has also done some excellent work in this area. This also has the benefit of being an educational site. <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/pli/detcms/navigation/discover/action-learning-resources/?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-246836>

A good general overview can be found in Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_learning

Action learning texts

Weinstein, Krystyna: *Action Learning: A Practical Guide*, Gower 1999. This is an excellent introduction. It is an accessible text that covers all the major issues although it does not have a schools focus.

McGILL, I & Brockbank, A: *The Action Learning Handbook: Powerful Techniques for Education, Professional Development and Training* (Revised ed), Routledge Falmer, Taylor & Francis Group, UK 2004. This is a powerful book written with an educational focus.

Both texts can be obtained through ETIS which is part of NSW DET. Find all the details on the ETIS website: <http://etis.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/cli/etis/index.shtml>

Web based questioning resources

Some excellent articles on questioning are located at: <http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC40/Peavey.htm> and http://www.thechangeagency.org/_dbase_upl/strat_questioning_man.pdf

The first link provides a good overview while the second link is a detailed manual. Both resources are the work of Fran Peavey.

NSW DET professional learning resources

The Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate have produced some excellent resources to support your learning.

A search of their website using the Google search at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/> will provide you with a range of alternatives to explore.

The coaching and mentoring programs developed by PLLDD have excellent components on questioning skills.

Teaching and Learning exchange - TaLe

To search for up to date resources log in at: <http://www.tale.edu.au/tale/live/index.jsp?callback=true&muid=000000&taleUserId=-445990256&userType=u&username=>